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Facebook Gives Users a Primer on Ads

By TANZINA VEGA

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Millions of users who visited their Facebook pages on Wednesday may have noticed a light blue banner that read: "About Ads: Ever wonder how Facebook makes money? Get the Details." Clicking on a link in the text took visitors to a page that explained why Facebook users see the ads they see.

"It takes a lot of money to hire the best engineers and build the technology needed to keep Facebook up and running," a Facebook product manager named Ami explains in a video on the page.

According to Ami, that cost was \$1 billion last year. To offset those costs, advertising keeps Facebook free for users.

"Unlike ads on television, ads on Facebook respond to your direct feedback," the narrator says. Users can click on ads they don't like and ask not to be shown similar ads in the future. "The ads on Facebook are meant to be useful, not disrupt your experience."

While the new advertising page may be useful to some Facebook users who are curious about advertising, it also comes at a time when many users are increasingly concerned about their privacy online and whether their personal data is being shared with advertisers.

To address that concern, the new page explains that Facebook does not sell a user's personal information, but instead it makes money by showing the right ads to the right audience.

Facebook has many different types of ads, but the ones that have been getting the most attention over the last few days are called "sponsored stories," which, as reported in the technology blog TechCrunch, will begin appearing in user's newsfeeds in 2012.

TechCrunch writer Josh Constance explains: "The ability to display promoted content alongside organic social content in the popular and highly addictive news feed is essentially the holy grail for advertisers. While users are attentively browsing photos and updates from friends, they'll end up consuming ads as well."

Facebook has been increasingly working with advertisers and advertising agencies by hosting "hackathons" and attempting to teach agencies how to better use the social networking platform.

In April, the company announced a new social ad unit created by Leo Burnett Chicago, part of the Publicis Groupe, that would allow advertisers to ask users questions. Other existing interactive ad units allow users to click that on an ad they "like", answer questions in a poll,

respond to event ads, accept free product samples, watch videos or use Facebook applications.

A Facebook representative issued this statement when asked about the new advertising page: "Educating people about how Facebook works is really important to us. We have a number of educational resources available, including in-line tips, a Help Center, a Safety Center, and a variety of Facebook Pages for different audiences and topics. Along these lines, we recently launched a page that we hope helps people better understand how advertising on Facebook works. We'll be doing a number of similar proactive initiatives on different topics throughout the coming year."

But no matter what users think about ads, or how much they know about them, one thing remains true: they cannot opt out of seeing them.

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